

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUDAPE 03279 01 OF 02 161317Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----106661 161322Z /42
P 161221Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2216

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUDAPEST 3279

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PEPR, UR, HU
SUBJECT: GOH ALLEGATION OF PAST IMPROPER USG ACTIVITY IN BUDAPEST

REF: (A) BUDAPEST 3258, (B) BUDAPEST 3267

1. AT THE REQUEST OF DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER BENYI AT THE END OF LAST WEEK, I CALLED ON HIM THIS MORNING, AUGUST 15. BENYI IS IN CHARGE OF DEPARTMENT XI AND THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I HAD MET HIM OFFICIALLY. HE EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS SEEING ME BECAUSE NAGY WAS ON VACATION. HE HAD TWO POINTS TO RAISE.

2. THE FIRST WAS RELATED TO AN INCIDENT SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHEN, AT A YOUTH RALLY ON THE EVE OF THE DEPARTURE OF THE HUNGARIAN DELEGATION TO THE WORLD YOUTH CONFERENCE IN HAVANA, A MURAL WAS DISPLAYED IN ONE OF THE TWO MAIN SQUARES OF BUDAPEST WHICH DEPICTED A FIGURE CLEARLY CARICATURED UNCLE SAM, WITH DOLLARS PAINTED ON ONE ARM AND SWASTIKAS AROUND THE OTHER. I HAD PROTESTED INFORMALLY TO NAGY AND BARTHA AT THE RESIDENCE THE EVENING BEFORE GOVERNOR HARRIMAN DEPARTED FROM BUDAPEST. THEY WERE TAKEN ABACK, PLED IGNORANCE, AND EMPHASIZED THAT THIS WAS NOT THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT'S ACTION. AT THE AIRPORT THE NEXT DAY, WHEN WE WERE BIDDING THE GOVERNOR AND HIS PARTY ADIEU, OUR POLITICAL OFFICER WAS INFORMED BY REVESZ, THE MFA AMERICAN DESK OFFICER, THAT THE MURAL WOULD BE REMOVED, THAT IT HAD BEEN DRAWN UP BY CHILEAN YOUTH AND DID NOT

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REFLECT GOVERNMENT VIEWS.

3. BENYI NOW GAVE ME "AN OFFICIAL REPLY" IN WHICH HE REPEATED IN EFFECT WHAT REVESZ HAD TOLD THE POLITICAL OFFICER, EMPHASIZING IN PARTICULAR THAT THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT REJECTED THE NOTION THAT THE U.S. COULD IN ANY WAY BE CONSIDERED FACIST.

4. THIS, AS IT TURNED OUT, WAS THE CARROT. BENYI, OBVIOUSLY EMBARRASSED, THEN TURNED TO THE SECOND POINT WHICH HE READ FROM A PREPARED SCRIPT. HE SAID THAT IN DECEMBER 1976 AN EMBASSY OFFICER IN BUDAPEST HAD "INDUCED A HUNGARIAN WHO WAS VISITING THE EMBASSY TO REVEAL STATE SECRETS." THIS HUNGARIAN HAD NOW BEEN DEALT WITH IN ACCORDANCE WITH ESTABLISHED LEGAL PROCEDURE, AND THE AMERICAN EMBASSY OFFICER HAD LEFT IN 1977. HE WANTED TO MAKE CLEAR TO ME THAT THE HUNGARIANS NOW CONSIDERED THIS INCIDENT CLOSED.

5. I TOLD HIM THAT I WAS "SURPRISED" -- AND WAS USING THE WORD "EUPHEMISTICALLY" -- THAT THE HUNGARIAN SHOULD RAISE THIS MATTER WITH ME NOW, A YEAR AND A HALF AFTER THE INCIDENT HAD APPARENTLY OCCURRED, AND AFTER THE PARTIES INVOLVED WERE NO LONGER ON THE SCENE. BENYI HASTENED TO ASSURE ME THAT THIS WAS NOT DIRECTED TO ME PERSONALLY, THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT APPRECIATED THE CONTRIBUTION I HAD MADE TO HUNGARIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, ETC., AND THAT THIS INCIDENT DID NOT REFLECT THE PRESENT STATE OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. (COMMENT: I DIDN'T QUITE CUT BENYI OFF, BUT I DON'T RECALL EVER RECEIVING A COMPLIMENT WITH LESS APPRECIATION.) HE BEGAN TO REPEAT HIS COMPLIMENT, AT WHICH POINT I BROKE IN AND SAID AGAIN, "I AM SURPRISED THAT YOU HAVE RAISED THIS MATTER AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME AND I WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR ACTION." AS I GOT UP TO LEAVE, HE MUTTERED THAT HE LOOKED FORWARD TO FUTURE MEETINGS, BUT ON MORE FAVORABLE SUBJECTS.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2217

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUDAPEST 3279

EXDIS

COMMENT:

6. BENYI, WHO WAS ACTING ON INSTRUCTIONS, WAS EMBARRASSED AND SELF-CONCIOUS THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION. IT IS INTERESTING THAT NAGY AND BARTHA AVOIDED BEING THE MESSENGERS. ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER RACZ MAY HAVE RECEIVED ME SO QUICKLY YESTERDAY, AUGUST 14 (REFTEL A) AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF MY MEETING

THIS MORNING.

7. I CAN ONLY SPECULATE ABOUT WHY THE GOH HAS RAISED THIS MATTER AT THE PRESENT TIME. THERE ARE SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES:

A. THIS RATHER STRANGE ACTION REFLECTED EITHER DIRECT PRESSURE FROM SOVIET SOURCES AND HUNGARIAN HARDLINERS OR ANTICIPATION OF SUCH PRESSURE. OVER SOME MONTHS NOW WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING, RELATIVELY SPEAKING, VERY FAVORABLE TREATMENT IN THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA. MUCH HAS BEEN MADE OF THE RETURN OF THE CROWN, THE TRADE AGREEMENT AND THE RECENT VISIT OF GOVERNOR HARRIMAN. IT IS NOT UNLIKELY THAT THIS HAS IRRITATED THE SOVIETS, PARTICULARLY AT A TIME WHEN RELATIONS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW ARE SO STRAINED, AND THAT THE HUNGARIANS HAVE BEEN MADE TO FEEL THAT THEY MUST TAKE SOME STEPS TO "REDRESS THE BALANCE."

B. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THIS MATTER WAS RAISED IN DIRECT CONNECTION WITH MY PROTEST OF THE ANTI-U.S. MURAL AT THE YOUTH RALLY.
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THE PROTEST, WHILE INFORMAL, WAS VIGOROUS AND WAS MADE TO HIGH-RANKING PEOPLE. IN ORDER FOR THE HUNGARIANS TO TAKE ACTION TO SATISFY IT (REMOVE THE MURAL) IT IS LIKELY THAT SOME NOSES IN THE HUNGARIAN BUREAUCRACY WERE BRUISED. THEIR RAISING THIS MATTER AT THIS TIME MAY BE THE RELATED PRICE WE HAD TO PAY FOR REMOVAL OF THE MURAL. THERE IS LITTLE TO SUPPORT THIS CONJECTURE OTHER THAN THE FACT THAT BENYI RAISED BOTH SUBJECTS IN THE SAME MEETING.

C. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT YESTERDAY'S MEETING WILL BE A PRELUDE TO MORE SERIOUS UNPLEASANTNESS. IF THE SOVIETS ARE ABOUT TO CONDUCT A PRESS CAMPAIGN ON THE PETERSON CASE IN CONNECTION WITH THE UPCOMING TRIAL OF SOVIET SPIES IN THE U.S., IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE THAT THE HUNGARIANS WILL FEEL COMPELLED TO JOIN IN THIS CAMPAIGN. YESTERDAY'S MEETING MAY HAVE BEEN A BEGINNING.

D. IT IS NATURAL, TOO, TO CONJECTURE WHETHER THERE IS ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS MORNING'S INTERVIEW AND THE RECENT EXPERIENCE OF IBM HUNGARY, AS DESCRIBED IN REFTEL (B).

8. WE WILL WATCH DEVELOPMENTS CLOSELY TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY FURTHER MANIFESTATIONS INDICATING THAT THE HUNGARIANS ARE ACTING ALONG THE LINES JUST SUGGESTED FOR THE REASONS MENTIONED.
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